

ENFIELD REVITALIZATION STRATEGY COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2016 - SPECIAL MEETING DATE
NORTH THOMPSONVILLE FIRE STATION
439 ENFIELD STREET, ENFIELD, CT 06082

A Special Meeting of the Enfield Revitalization Strategy Committee was held on Thursday, December 1, 2016, at the North Thompsonville Fire Station, 439 Enfield Street, Enfield, Connecticut

CALLED TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 pm by Chair, Earl Stallings.

ROLL CALL

Present: Chair Earl Stallings, Jerry Fitzsimons, Brittany Heisler, Connie Provencher, Vice-Chair Ken Edgar.

ALSO PRESENT

Peter Bryanton, Director of Community Development, Bryan Chodkowski, Enfield Town Manager, Ed Deni, Town Council, Dawn Hunt, Community Development Secretary.

ABSENT

Michael Scalzo, Linda DeGray, Colleen Reidy, Mary Scutt, Planning & Zoning, Teri Anderson, Bill Lee, Town Council, Jennifer Bruyette, John Foxx, Michelle Lewandowski, and William "Red" Edgar, Town Council.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- The 8/25/16 and 9/22/16 meeting minutes were tabled until next meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Thompsonville Action Plan: Welcome Guide Draft - updated**
Members reviewed the revised rough draft guide prepared by Peter Bryanton, which now includes categories: points of interest, recreation and activities, dining and food service, shopping and services, and public parking. Items are numbered and will coordinate with the map of Thompsonville. There are a lot of historical points of interest that could be a hook to entice visitors. Can't possibly list every single business in the guidebook, so will have to consider business partners or paid sponsors to be listed in the guide. Earl stated that a digital format would be needed. Peter envisions it being on the town website with links to the listed businesses and locations. Earl stated the digital aspect should include sharing and linking to social media and other apps. Brittany suggested down the road using Snapchat with overlays of the historical sites as they once were that people can use. Members discussed the need to provide things and attractions that are exciting to young people, such as the Enfield Tap has done, as a starting point for walking tours or "cash mobs" where people spend in the community. Members discussed the value Mark's restaurant has added to the community. Members discussed the types of businesses they'd like to see listed in the guide – being fair while keeping the focus on the small businesses in the community.

Members discussed creating a walking tour map as the historical points are within a half mile or so. Local business owners feel there needs to be more done to spruce up storefronts and landscaping. Members discussed the need for streets and storefronts to stay lit at night to help curb crime, and that inviting more businesses to the area encourages shoppers and patrons and

will help drive out the criminal element. Members noted the area around the Warner Theater in Torrington used to be a bad area and was quickly revitalized. Peter stated they used the Main Street Program where businesses in the district pay into a special fund that is used to make improvements within the district, but all businesses have to commit to it. The town may also contribute via grant funds. Thompsonville lacks a critical mass of businesses, so it might make sense to include North Thompsonville with Thompsonville as one district. Many property owners see the Main Street Program as a cut to the storefront rents they're taking in.

Members further discussed creating a walking tour of the historical points. Bryan Chodkowski suggested approaching the school district to use a walking tour of Thompsonville as part of local history class. Placards could be placed at each historical point with corresponding maps that include paid advertising by local businesses. There may be grant funds that could help the school district fund the field trips. Then the kids could go home and share what they learned with their parents, essentially promoting the neighborhood. High school students might be utilized to design the walking tour as part of one of their projects. Jerry suggested that the Chamber of Commerce could be involved, as well as the Enfield Cultural Arts Commission. Earl suggested implementing similar techniques as used on historical bus tours that create excitement and use humor, keeping things age appropriate.

Members discussed the incoming commuter rail and how it will bring people into the area with stops every half hour or so with service slated to start in 2018, however Enfield's rail station may not be ready in time. Members discussed on the Planning & Zoning level, we can't dictate what businesses go in to the area but the zoning determines where certain businesses can go. Enfield's zoning needs to be updated with more planning of design elements, though this can be hard to do with the high volume of regulatory items. Local business owners feel the zoning ordinances, particularly with signage, are very strict and would like to see this relaxed. Members urged them to address their concerns with the planning and zoning commission through public hearings and public comments at meetings.

Members discussed how there is a perception that Thompsonville is a high crime "bad" area though the crime stats are actually not much different than the rest of the town. Members discussed the reality of the nicer areas in Thompsonville and how they don't feel unsafe walking around the area. Events such as the community garden and community farmers market encourage more foot traffic but there aren't a lot of open store fronts for business to move into, not a lot of walkable businesses. More needs to be done to incentivize businesses to move into the area. The political leaders in the community need to step up and encourage more mixed used zoning for more small walkable businesses that are needed and can be utilized by the community, in addition to more commercial zoning along the riverfront.

Several of the business owners from the North Thompsonville area feel that cosmetic updates are needed along Route 5 similar to what was done in Hazardville, such as lighting. Peter stated that, should funding be available, changes would need to be coordinated with the State since it's a state road. Members also discussed the possibility of reducing the number of lanes on Route 5 and adding pull-in style parking along the road. Peter stated they'd need to find a way to slow traffic down on Route 5 in order for that style of parking to work for safety reasons.

Bryan asked the business owners if they would want to pay the same in taxes for less services to make money available for these cosmetic changes they desire. Or would they want council to

increase the tax mil rate to keep the services the same and create money for the cosmetic changes. Business owners would prefer a grant, but grant funds are very hard to obtain as more communities are competing for fewer grant dollars. Business owners want a guarantee that the additional money will be used for the changes they desire, and that those changes will generate more traffic and business. Bryan stated there are no guarantees, only risks, in investing in your business, but they have to consider if the risk is worth the long term return.

NEW BUSINESS

- **46 High Street / Change of Use to Computer Repair Store**

Peter stated that Planning & Zoning took up this application first due to the timing of meetings, and approved the change of use pending approval by this committee (ERSC). The applicant, Jaime Lopez-Santos was present and described his intentions for the business, stating he may do a soft opening in the mornings and evenings to allow for drop offs/pick ups of items. His hours of operation will change and evolve as the business grows. Members recommended that he take advantage of local groups on social media to advertise his business opening and operating hours. **A motion was made by Jerry Fitzsimons seconded by Brittany Heisler to approve the application and recommend the application to Planning & Zoning. All in Favor, motions passes 5-0-0.**

- **Rebuilding Downtown Publication**

The first section of this publication, handed out at the last meeting, talks about engaging public opinion and participation in the revitalization process. Peter will provide the second section of the document later. This document has great ideas to employ and will help include more community involvement, such as this meeting provided with having businesses owners in attendance. There was a TOD meeting in October where different ideas for downtown and the train station were discussed, and people who live in the area were able to provide feedback. Peter stated we have a lot of plans and what we need are actionable items that we can actually move on.

Connie stated she's worried about the number of closed businesses / empty buildings along Route 5. She asked if there is anything that can be done with the commercial property owners who leave the properties vacant. Peter stated it would be a policy issue for the town. The state has passed legislation that allows towns to tax vacant/foreclosed properties at higher rates to disincentivize leaving it vacant because the vacancies cause a drop in surrounding property values, but the Town Council would have to vote a policy into place. Bryan stated that in the coming year he's looking for ways to empower the town to do more code enforcement and property maintenance in a more timely manner within the confines of the statutes. Bryan plans to ask council to put more money toward abating blight. In addition the Economic Development Commission is looking to create Tax Increment Finance districts, where, as property values increase within each district, the increased tax revenue could only be spent to make improvements back into the district where the money was raised. Earl stated it's inevitable that property values will rise likely resulting in taxes rising, but the TIF is a better way to appropriate that additional tax revenue back into the community. Creating TIF districts is a legislative process, and the Town Council would have a statutory process to go through – both to create the districts and to dissolve a district. Earl stated the business owners need to participate and speak up at council meetings and public hearings as this process moves forward to voice their support and suggestions. Members discussed soliciting local large business to invest in

beautification in the community through donations. Jerry inquired about the Neighborhood Assistance Act, where businesses can donate and get a tax credit for community projects that are approved by the state, and suggested the group look into potential projects and donors. Peter will forward the Act itself to the group for review. Earl stated it would be beneficial to have someone with a sales background undertake the solicitation of participating businesses.

REPORT OF TOWN STAFF, Peter Bryanton

- Peter provided a "Projects and Activities" report handout for members to review. He stated the old Hallmark property on Bacon Road now has two leasees who are in the packaging business and the building will be repurposed in 6-8 months from Hallmark moving out. These companies are adding about 100 new jobs, a million square feet of new building space, and both will increase as the companies grow. He stated the company that bought the property is Class A, they know what they are doing, and they are looking to buy more properties in Enfield. Peter stated that a lot of the vacant commercial buildings are being snatched up, and that new development will now be key. Most businesses looking to locate to Enfield are shipping and warehousing.
- Bryan stated that a new Director of Development Services, Michael Ciriello, has been hired and will start on January 9, 2017. He will oversee the Building Department, Planning Department and Community Development Department.
- Mall update – they are looking to fill vacancies and have many holiday vendors in and are looking to hold more special events in the future.

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

No public communications.

COMMITTEE COMMUNICATIONS

- Next meeting is scheduled for January 26, 2017, tentatively to be held at the Hazardville firehouse.

ADJOURNMENT

- A motion was made by Connie Provencher seconded by Jerry Fitzsimons to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 8:57 pm.

Submitted by:

Dawn Hunt, Community Development Secretary

Approved by:

Earl Stallings, Chairman

Signature _____ **Date** _____